

# **AYMAN AL-ZAWAHIRI: THE IDEOLOGUE OF MODERN ISLAMIC MILITANCY**

by

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March 2004

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## The Author

Lieutenant Commander Youssef Aboul-Enein was commissioned in the Navy Medical Service Corps in 1994 to serve as Assistant Material Manager at Naval Hospital in Jacksonville, Florida. In 1996, he was Task Force Medical Administrator aboard USS GUAM (LPH-9) Amphibious Ready Group. Raised in the Middle East and speaking two dialects of Arabic, he was tasked in 1997 and again in 1999 to be the Arabic linguist and Middle East Advisor during Exercise Bright Star in Egypt. He then reported to Naval Hospital Great Lakes Illinois as Plans Operations and Medical Intelligence Officer. Since September 11th, he has worked as Middle East advisor at the Defense Intelligence Agency and is currently assigned as Country Director for North Africa and Assistant Country Director for the Arabian Peninsula at the Office of the Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs.

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In 1990, Aboul-Enein earned a Bachelors of Business Administration degree from the University of Mississippi. He earned a Masters in Health Services Administration and in Business Administration from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock in 1993. In 2002, he received a Masters of Science of Strategic Intelligence from the Joint Military Intelligence College in Washington, D.C. He has earned Non-Resident diplomas in Command and Staff with an emphasis on International Relations from the Naval War College, the Army War College Defense Strategy Course and the Marine Corps Institute Amphibious Warfare School.

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## **Dedication**

This monograph is dedicated to U.S. and Pakistani troops who are putting their lives in danger to apprehend Ayman Al-Zawahiri and other Al-Qaeda operatives along the Afghan-Pakistan border.



## **Ayman Al-Zawahiri: The Ideologue of Modern Islamic Militancy**

Youssef H. Aboul-Enein

### **I. Introduction**

Egyptian physician Ayman Al-Zawahiri is considered by many to be the brains behind Al-Qaeda organization. Understanding Al-Zawahiri is to understand the most violent form of Islamic radicalism, one where there is no negotiation and an uncompromising attitude in waging an offensive jihad on those he has deemed as enemies of his brand of Islamic fundamentalism. He is even a controversial figure within the Islamic political movement. This complex figure requires careful study as we embark on our mission to fight terrorism around the globe.

### **Biography**

Born in 1951 to a distinguished family, Ayman Muhammad Rabi' Al-Zawahiri's ancestry is of Arabian tribal stock who settled in Egypt around 1860. His paternal grandfather, Sheikh Al-Ahmadi Al-Zawahiri, was a distinguished Islamic scholar and the Imam of the Al-Azhar Mosque. His father was a pharmacology professor at Ain Shams University. His maternal grandfather, Abdul-Wahab Azzam, was a professor of Oriental literature, president of Cairo University and Egyptian Ambassador to Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Well known for his Islamic knowledge and piety, he was often nicknamed, "the devout ambassador." His granduncle, Abdul-Razaq Azzam, was the first Secretary General of the Arab League.<sup>1</sup>

Muntassir-al-Zayat, an Islamist lawyer who was imprisoned with Al-Zawahiri in the eighties, wrote a chilling book about Usama Bin Laden's ideologue. Entitled, *Ayman Al-Zawahiri As I Knew Him*, Al-Zayat delves into the militant rationalism that Al-Zawahiri espouses. The book explains how Al-Zawahiri was first turned on to Islam as a means of violent political expression after the 1967 Six-Day War.<sup>2</sup> After being

swept up by Nasser's wave of Arab nationalism, the crushing defeat sent many Egyptians searching for answers, and a few like Zawahiri found it in Islamic radicalism. According to Al-Zayat's book, *Ayman Al-Zawahiri as I Knew Him*, the writings of Sayed Qutb offered an explanation for the 1967 War.<sup>3</sup> Illustrative of Qutb's writings that speak to those seeking a militant Islamic solution are, "our first task is to change society in deed, to alter the *jahiliyah* reality from top to bottom. We must get rid of this *jahiliyah* society; we must abandon its values and ideology."<sup>4</sup> Two concepts emerge from Qutb's book *Maalim fi-al Tariq* (*Signposts*).<sup>5</sup> The book reduces the conflict to a war of ideology, in which faith is in conflict with the materialism of the West. The book also categorizes the Egyptian society, although Muslim in character including the government appointed *ulama* (clergy), as being in a state of *jahiliyah* or pre-Islamic ignorance. Even the founder of the Islamic Brotherhood, Hassan Al-Banna did not characterize Egyptian society as a whole with the label of *jahili*. This term was used to describe the Meccans who waged war against the Prophet Muhammad and was not used to describe other Muslims except by fringe groups like the Kharijites and the writings of Ibn Taymiyyah.

Al-Zawahiri would also shape his ideas from Nasserist diatribe. For example in Nasser's book, *The Philosophy of the Revolution*, Nasser explains the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the encirclement of his unit in the Faluja Pocket in terms of needing to defeat the enemy within (the Egyptian monarchy) before defeating the Israelis.<sup>6</sup> Zawahiri would give this an Islamist spin, writing that one can only defeat the enemy who is far by defeating the enemy who is near (the Egyptian Republic) and this can only be accomplished by declaring these rulers apostates and declaring a Jihad upon them.

It is significant to pause and reflect that Ayman Al-Zawahiri graduated from high school in 1966 and was on his way to university when several events occurred – such as the severe crackdown of the Muslim Brotherhood by Nasser and the 1967 Six-Day War. This reflects the ideological zeal of youth combined with forming solid jihadist theories at an early age. Muntassir-Al-Zayat quotes a deposition given by Al-Zawahiri in 1981, when he stood accused of collaborating in the assassination of President Anwar Sadat. In the deposition he says, "I (Al-Zawahiri) first joined an Islamist organization in 1966 under the tutelage of Ismail Tantawi, who advocated the creation of cells within the Egyptian

government.” He goes on to describe how these theories differed from the Muslim Brotherhood and that Tantawi’s vision would come to fruition with the 1975 Military Technical College revolt.<sup>7</sup> This movement was patterned after Nasser’s revolt when he organized the Free Officers Association within the Egyptian military and cooperated with the Muslim Brotherhood who also had cells in the Egyptian military. That brought about the 1952 overthrow of the monarchy of King Farouk. This is a jihadist adaptation of the events leading to the 1952 creation of the Egyptian Republic.

Among the works that influenced Al-Zawahiri and justified his theories for the violent overthrow of Arab regimes is the work of thirteenth century Islamic commentator Ibn Taymiyyah who wrote the book *Al-Siyasah Al-Shariyah* (The Islamic Polity). It is a staple of every Islamic militant and it proposes such concepts as a social compact between the governor and the governed, based upon piety. The people owe their allegiance to a ruler in return for the ruler governing according to Islamic law.

In addition, he took the extraordinary step of re-awakening the seventh century doctrines of the *Kharijites* (The Outsiders). The Kharijites felt that anyone who cheated God of His divine plan is an apostate and their killing is sanctioned. The Kharijites also elevated Jihad to being a sixth pillar of Islam, contrary to the fact that there are only five pillars in Islam and Jihad is not one of them. Ibn Taymiyyah applied this doctrine on the Mongols, who, although converted to Islam, still retained their tribal laws. He argued that since the Mongols did not practice Islamic law, they are apostates and their killing is an obligation and duty until they accepted Islamic law. His writings became a political tool for rulers to declare their political rivals to be apostates.

In court transcripts of Al-Zawahiri’s trial, obtained by Muntassir Al-Zayat, he was asked when he became interested in Islamic fundamentalism. He responded that it was during his final year of high school (1965-1966) during Nasser’s crushing arrests of 17,000 members of the Muslim Brotherhood and subsequent execution of many Islamic brothers, including the eminent Sayed Qutb, that he looked into forming an Islamist group. It became solidified in Al-Zawahiri’s my mind when Nasser, while visiting Moscow, made his announcement to crack down on the Muslim Brotherhood that this was an ideological war against Islam

and required the efforts of its youth to topple Nasser. He and three other students would establish a cell within his high school and call it *Tanzeem* (The Organization) in 1966-67. The Emir (Head) of this organization was Ismail Tantawi and it continued gathering members until 1975. The purpose of the organization was the violent overthrow of the Egyptian government and the establishment of an Islamic government in its place.

When asked by the prosecutor what Zawahiri meant by an Islamic government, he explained that he meant a government that rules according to the dictates of Islamic Law.

The prosecution then asked him about his views on Jihad. Al-Zawahiri answered with clarity that Jihad meant the removal of the current government through revolution and bringing about an Islamic government in its place. This revolution can only come about through the use of force and the cooperation of the military with civilians to bring about this goal. He then told the prosecutor that the current regime does not govern according to Islamic law and that this was only the start of the revolution. Al-Zawahiri said that there was a long road ahead before the violent overthrow of the Egyptian government could become a reality.<sup>8</sup>

The name Tanzeem would evolve into *Tanzeem al-Jihad* or simply *Al-Jihad* which is known by its acronym EIJ (Egyptian Islamic Jihad), the organization that Zawahiri would take control of in 1975, following government purges of his organization and the exile of other Tazeem leaders.

Court transcripts of the 1981 trial offer insight into his revolutionary thoughts and include this chilling answer to the question on Al-Zawahiri's ideology by prosecutor Mahmood Masood of Egypt's national security apparatus.

Al-Zawahiri explained that his organization was striving towards gradual stages of the revolution, first recruiting many members from the civilian sector while actively pursuing members within the military and security establishments. He went on to elaborate about revolution being a technically complex matter, requiring the planning of someone with a military background.<sup>9</sup> This is significant, for it shows his modus operandi, a mixture of long-range planning, patience and a determination to accomplish his objective.

In his book, Muntassir-Al-Zayat describes Al-Zawahiri as a young college student, one with high morals, calm, reflective and not very

talkative. He was, however, driven and focused in all his efforts to achieve his goals and complete his tasks. He was often solicited for advice and was the one to take major decisions on the course his Islamist group should take after listening to his friends and fellow Muslim associates.

Al-Zawahiri is also keenly proud of his ancestry and heritage and perhaps this was one way in which he and Usama Bin Laden found common ground,<sup>10</sup> as Bin Laden is keenly conscious of his aristocratic origins, and is particularly proud of his father. In the case of Al-Zawahiri, he is keenly proud of his maternal and paternal grandfathers. Both Bin Laden and Al-Zawahiri would be influenced and militarized by the same cleric in different years. Shiekh Abdullah Azzam, the Palestinian and creator of *Maktab-Al-Khadamat* (Services Offices) that organized thousands of Afghan Arabs during the Soviet War in Afghanistan, would obtain his doctorate at Al-Azhar University in Egypt in the early seventies, meeting Al-Zawahiri and further shaping his jihadist views.

Sheikh Azzam, known as the fighting Sheikh for his uncompromising views on offensive jihad, also discovered Usama Bin Laden as a young college student at King Abdul-Aziz University in Jeddah, where Azzam's lectures electrified audiences and turned them onto restoring Islamic glory through violence. Azzam's Maktab Al-Khadamat was also known as *Al-Qaeda Al-Sulbah* (The Firm Base).<sup>11</sup> Upon Azzam's assassination in 1989, both Bin Laden and Al-Zawahiri would inherit the organization now known as Al-Qaeda.

Al-Zawahiri became active in the Islamic militant movement. He was involved in the Military Technical College Revolt in 1975 and the assassination of Sadat in 1981. He completed his medical degree in 1974 and earned a specialization in surgery in 1978.<sup>12</sup> Al-Zawahiri spent three years in an Egyptian jail from 1981 to 1984, after which he left Egypt for Pakistan to serve as a physician in the Afghan jihad against the Soviets.

## **II. Issam Al-Qamari: Al-Zawahiri's Alter Ego? (1967-1981)**

It is worth devoting a section on the relationship between Al-Zawahiri and the late Islamic militant and former armored corps officer, Issam Al-

Qamari. Al-Zawahiri devotes an entire chapter to him in his book *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*. He describes Al-Qamari in mythic terms, describing how he met a heroic death at the hands of the Egyptian security forces while lobbing grenades at them and holding them off until fatally wounded.

Al-Zawahiri's relationship with Al-Qamari may have gone back to their high school days, where they discussed revolutionary ideologies and agreed that an Islamic fundamentalist movement was the only way to rid Egypt of Sadat and Mubarak. According to Muntassir Al-Zayat's book, they both agreed that a military takeover was the only means of fomenting a revolution. This is what led Al-Qamari to join the military academy and rise through to the rank of major in the Egyptian Armored Corps. Both men dreamt of a quick revolution that spared the Egyptian people from bloodshed.

Al-Zayat writes about the time when both Al-Zawahiri and Al-Qamari were incarcerated for Islamist activities. Al-Zayat describes Al-Qamari as a charismatic figure who organized and led Islamist cells within Egypt's Tura Prison and it was during their incarceration and interrogation in 1981-1982, that the idea occurred to them of splitting from the *Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiyah* (The Islamic Group) and forming the more ultra-militant *Tanzeem Al-Jihad*.<sup>13</sup>

The Egyptian Military Technical College Revolt conducted in 1975 was a seminal event in Al-Zawahiri's experience. He assesses it in his 2001 book, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, writing that this coup failed because it did not take into consideration the objective conditions and the need to prepare well for them. The group who attacked the gate of the college was untrained. The lesson for Al-Zawahiri was patience and training, theories that he would try out later in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Unable to endure torture when he and many other army officers and civilians were rounded up during the investigation into Sadat's assassination, Al-Zawahiri gave depositions and served as a witness implicating his friend and hero, Al-Qamari. He also led Egyptian security forces to Al-Qamari's hideout. Many jihadists within Egypt believe that Al-Zawahiri as leader of Al-Jihad should have faced martyrdom to protect the organization. His cooperation with the authorities perhaps led to his quick exit from Egypt to Saudi Arabia and on to Afghanistan.<sup>14</sup>

In Al-Zawahiri's book, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, Al-Qamari is depicted as the model Islamic militant, who escapes from prison and bravely fights off Egyptian security forces before being killed himself. It can be argued that Al-Qamari represents Al-Zawahiri's alter ego, the mythic militant he would want to be. He also credits Al-Qamari as an Islamic militant visionary. Al Zawahiri writes that Al-Qamari postulated that the only way to counter the regime is to form an armed vanguard to wage battles, to control the capital (Cairo) and engage the armed forces for two weeks before a violent overthrow could be considered. To create this army, he argued that Egyptian militants needed weapons training in tanks, demolitions and firearms. In Afghanistan, Al-Zawahiri would test these ideas and re-invent his organization, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ).

### **III. Re-taking Islamic Jihad and Al-Zawahiri's Revolutionary Zeal (1981-1992)**

It is important to note that Al-Zawahiri spent seven months in Afghanistan as early as 1980 and then returned for short trips in 1981, 1984 and 1986. During this time he formulated his ideas on jihad and reaffirmed his commitment to Islamic militancy, seeing the opportunity to gain military and political experience for jihadists in Egypt. He envisioned training a competent armed vanguard in Afghanistan and then reinserting them into Egypt to train and carry out active combat within the country.<sup>15</sup>

It is also in Afghanistan where Al-Zawahiri and Usama Bin Laden cooperated for the first time, sharing a similar experience with the fighting cleric Sheikh Abdullah Azzam. This cleric hardened their views and, while in northern Pakistan, coordinated and organized the thousands of Arab-Afghans arriving to participate in the jihad against the Soviets.

From 1987 to 1990, Ayman Al-Zawahiri concentrated his efforts on the jihad against the Soviets. He had spent over five years outside of Egypt. During this time, other contenders like the intelligence officer and jihadist, Colonel Abood Al-Zummur, had taken over the leadership of EIJ while in an Egyptian prison. According to Al-Zayat's book, Al-Zawahiri served as a point man in Afghanistan for Egyptian Islamic militants, offering them access to camps, military training and actual combat experience for EIJ members.

Two such Egyptian-Afghan mujahideen and EIJ members, Naeem Nabeel Abdul-Fatah and Tharwat Salah, would help Al-Zawahiri regain control of the organization. They would distribute Al-Zawahiri's communiqués and copious writings to EIJ members. These writings were distinguished from other jihadist tracts by fine printing and a special yellow cover. They distributed the pamphlets and books written by Al-Zawahiri to junior members of EIJ and also used them to recruit more members. By the time Naeem Abdul-Fatah was apprehended in 1991 and Tharwat Salah had escaped the authorities by moving to Afghanistan, Al-Zawahiri had won the media war among Islamists, and was the most recognizable name in the EIJ movement.<sup>16</sup> Young members thought of him as a man of action who lived the jihadist ideals he preached in Afghanistan.

#### **IV. Zawahiri's Appreciation for the Media and Efforts During the Soviet-Afghan War (1982-1992)**

Al-Zawahiri's use of pamphlets to bolster his reputation and to regain control of the EIJ demonstrates his appreciation for the media. No doubt, he carefully studied how Ayatollah Khomeini used cassette tapes smuggled into Iran to foment a revolution against the Shah that finally brought about the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. He is also adept at manipulating Islamic history to suit his political objectives.

In Chris Hedges' book, *War is a Force That Gives Life Meaning*, he describes how every religion and ethnic group nurtures certain myths, often centered on the creation of a nation or the movement itself. These myths lie unseen beneath the surface waiting for the moment to rise ascendant to define and glorify followers in times of crisis.<sup>17</sup> These myths are preached in mosques, played on television stations, and preserved in books and pamphlets. Al-Zawahiri is a copious writer on Islamic militancy and his theses revolve around the myths justifying offensive jihad.

In *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner* or Al-Zawahiri's earlier book *Bitter Harvest*, he plays upon the victimization of Muslims around the world. He demonizes perceived enemies using militant commentators as

his primary source and then applies select Quran verses along with Prophet Muhammad's sayings taken out of historical context.

In Al-Zawahiri's writings he leaves no room for Islamic history that shows Prophet Muhammad's establishment of a Medinan Constitution in which Muslims and non-Muslims lived as one community in Medina. There is no mention of the importance of Christians in the nurturing of early Islam, such as the granting of asylum for Muslims by the Christian King of Abyssinia. Prophet Muhammad mourned his death, because of his fair treatment of Muslims under his protection.

Al-Zawahiri also argues for the return of the Caliphate and an Islamic government, even though Prophet Muhammad and the Quran do not give guidance on how Muslims should govern themselves.

During the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Al-Zawahiri developed a recruitment system whereby young members of EIJ who participated in the Soviet-Afghan war returned to Egypt in the mid-eighties to recruit more fighters for the jihad. He typically sent recruiters to towns in Southern Egypt like El-Minia and the region known as Al-Saeed (Southern Egypt). Most often college students or graduates were the focus of recruitment efforts. It is obvious from Arabic sources that Al-Zawahiri was looking for quality fighters who had training in engineering and other technical skills.<sup>18</sup> This recruitment method required marketing and media efforts to attract the college graduates to the Afghan war, again demonstrating Al-Zawahiri's prowess in marketing the jihad.

When Al-Zawahiri was in Afghanistan, he served as a physician in Peshawar, Pakistan, organized *Maktab Jihad al Islamee* (Islamic Jihad Office) and published a monthly newsletter entitled, "Al-Fath" (The Opening). During the war, Bin Laden and Al-Zawahiri cooperated, but their relationship did not become close until the end of the war in 1988. After the Soviet withdrawal, two camps emerged within the Arab-Afghan movement. Al-Zawahiri and Bin Laden wanted the Arab Afghans to return to their native lands and foment revolution throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Abdullah Azzam wanted the Arab Afghans to remain and build an Islamic emirate in Afghanistan that would consolidate itself and begin the liberation of former Islamic Soviet Republics.

Bin Laden came to rely on EIJ leaders to run his affairs and Al-Zawahiri came to rely on Bin Laden's source of funding. Bin Laden's top leadership consisted of Egyptian jihadists like the late Abu Hafs (Head of

Security), Saiid Al-Masri (Finance), the captured Mohammad Omar Abdul Rahman (Operations and Training), and Midhat Mursi (Weapons and Research) to name a few top echelon members of Al-Qaeda.<sup>19</sup> These are all handpicked EIJ members that Al-Zawahiri provides as a means of maintaining control of Al-Qaeda behind the scenes.

In court transcripts during the Sadat assassination trials, Al-Zawahiri highlights how his organization differs from the Muslim Brotherhood and the organization *Al-Takfir wal-Hijra* (Excommunication and Migration). His Islamic Jihad stands for the overthrow of the Egyptian government with no negotiation or compromise. Despite the fact that members of the Muslim Brotherhood often challenged the Egyptian government policies, sometimes violently, Al-Zawahiri, nevertheless, asserts that they have too often cooperated with the authorities in Cairo. This, he believes, weakens the organization causing members to forget the true mission of replacing the government with an Islamic state. He criticized those who would stray from this path to pursue, instead, government perks, rewards, and funds. He views *Al-Takfir wal-Hijrah* as isolating itself from what needs to be done to bring about change, which is the establishment of a vanguard that would offer armed resistance to the government.<sup>20</sup>

Al-Zawahiri opposes any Islamist group that tries to settle with the government or is enticed into participating with the regime. Muntassir Al-Zayat identifies this as the most destructive aspect of Al-Zawahiri and explains how many Islamist political groups resent his refusal to negotiate or compromise with those in power.

## **V. End of the Afghan War (1989-1998)**

The crisis over what to do with the thousands of battle-hardened Arabs in Afghanistan came to a violent resolution in 1989 when Abdullah Azzam was assassinated by a car bomb along with his two sons in Peshawar. Bin Laden effectively took control of his organization and began creating the worldwide network that is Al-Qaeda; Ayman Al-Zawahiri became an indispensable advisor and wanted to renew the violent overthrow of the Egyptian government using these Arab-Afghans.

From 1989 to 1992, Afghan warlords debated about what to do with non-Afghans who chose to remain. Some were tried in abstentia and

could not return to the Middle East. Sibghatullah El-Mojaddaddi, the interim Afghan President, called for all non-Afghans to leave. Burhanuddin Rabbani wanted them to remain as a reserve force to be used by his faction against other Afghan warlords.<sup>21</sup>

Al-Zawahiri worried that if Arab fighters remained in Afghanistan they would be sucked up in tribal warfare and sidetracked from his focus of a violent overthrow of the Egyptian government. He found refuge in Yemen and Sudan in 1992, these countries providing bases from which he could infiltrate fighters into Egypt in order to organize cells. Al-Zawahiri persuaded Bin Laden to adopt a jihadist mission beyond the defeat of the Soviet Union, a worldwide jihad using his money and investments in Sudan and Yemen to establish a base of operations.

Muntassir-al-Zayat's book details the methodical planning Al-Zawahiri conducted to find a place for his Arab Afghans. This planning included drawing up a list of nations next to Egypt and assessing their viability to conduct armed resistance along the lines of the Afghan model. This short list was narrowed down to Sudan, Yemen and Jordan. Even the cost of living and sustaining cells was taken into consideration, and Yemen, unstable due to the skirmishes between tribes, was looked at as containing a robust Egyptian community. Al-Zawahiri deemed Sudan a costly place to sustain cells, but nonetheless viewed it as a useful sanctuary from which to conduct violence against the Mubarak regime across the border in Egypt.<sup>22</sup>

From 1989 to 1998, Al-Zawahiri, determined to destroy Egypt's economic resources, primarily tourism, began calling for strikes on the symbols of the Egyptian government. He heavily renewed his criticism of Islamist political groups who negotiate with the government and his followers during this time conducted attacks on former Prime Minister Atef Sidqi, which led to the death of an innocent child. Attacks included the 1994 bombing of the Egyptian embassy in Islamabad and a failed attack on Israeli tourists in the Cairo bazaar, Khan-el-Khalili. Other attacks included the failed assassination of former Interior Minister Hassan Al-Alfi, the Luxor attacks, the Cairo Museum bus bombing and an attack on President Mubarak in Addis Ababa in 1998. The death of the young child Shayma during the failed attempt on former Prime Minister Sidqi so appalled Egyptian public opinion that Al-Zawahiri was forced to

issue a statement regretting her death in the cause of resistance against the government.

The Egyptian people began taking a negative view of Islamists. Financing and other forms of support dried up not only for Al-Zawahiri's EIJ, but also for other Islamist groups in Egypt. The crackdown by the government led many violent members of EIJ to escape to Sudan and Yemen and Al-Zawahiri became frustrated at the failure of operations within Egypt.<sup>23</sup> He had to search for alternate means of funding as well as a new direction for his jihad.

## **VI. Bin-Laden and Al-Zawahiri Form the World Islamic Front for the Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders (1998)**

An entire chapter of Muntassir-Al-Zayat's book deals with the shift of Al-Zawahiri's ideology from focusing efforts to topple the Egyptian government to attacking the United States. Al-Zawahiri, disappointed in his failed plans to foment revolution in Egypt, and the downfall of his credibility among the Egyptian public caused by death of a young child, was led to shift directions by attacking symbols of American power.

Another reason for Al-Zawahiri's doctrinal shift was a major setback caused by the arrest and conviction of 108 EIJ members in a military tribunal in Egypt, in what became known as the Returnees from Albania Case. A laptop of a senior EIJ member was discovered that contained hundreds of member names and Egyptian authorities promptly rounded them up.<sup>24</sup>

These blows to EIJ could not be overcome and by 1997, Al-Zawahiri was looking for an alternate plan to keep the struggle going. Bin Laden had already publicly declared war on the United States in 1996. However, Al-Zawahiri was still hoping to stimulate the liberation of Jerusalem through the violent overthrow of the regime in Egypt. It would be 1998 before Al-Zawahiri abandoned his slogan of liberating Jerusalem through a revolt in Cairo and joined forces with Bin Laden.

Al-Zayat's book explains that Al-Zawahiri's formal alliance with Bin Laden in 1998, establishing the World Islamic Front for the Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders, was driven primarily by financial desperation and the search for a credible mission to replace the failures of his operations in

Egypt. Al-Zayat writes that many Islamist groups, including members of his own EIJ, did not know of the formal union between the two until it was announced on television and in the media.

Many jihadists and Islamists resented Al-Zawahiri's doctrinal shift from the internal enemy (The Egyptian Government) to the external enemy (The United States) without consultation. The Bin Laden/Al Zawahiri announcement of an alliance followed the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar-al-Salam, which Al-Zayat claims was calculated by Al-Zawahiri to rid himself of Islamist opponents within Egypt, including EIJ members who had spoken out against him.

Al-Zayat devotes an entire chapter criticizing the attack on the United States and the events of September 11th as causing great harm to jihadist movements around the world, arguing that the attacks on the United States (in particular 9-11) have caused asylum opportunities for Arab-Afghans to dry up. It also destroyed sources of income in Europe and America and destroyed the lives of many Arab-Afghan fighters who settled in Afghanistan and were living normal lives unrelated to the Taliban or Al-Qaeda.<sup>25</sup>

Al-Zayat complains that his attack only served to severely curtail the major source of income for Islamist groups provided by charities and Arab-Afghans living in Europe. He goes further by implying in his book that the attacks on the United States have also served to seek revenge not only on America but also against the Gamma al-Islamiyah (The Islamic Group) and the Muslim Brotherhood. Al-Zawahiri has had an ongoing feud with both of these Islamist organizations for their cooperation with and participation in the Egyptian government.<sup>26</sup>

Al-Zawahiri hoped the attacks of September 11th would galvanize Islamist movements and force them away from their policies of participating with the government. Al-Zawahiri writes about Islamist apathy in his book, *Bitter Harvest*, and the need to rekindle the flame of armed resistance laid down by the late Abboud Al-Zumur.<sup>27</sup> From a strategic perspective, attacking the United States directly is seen to stimulate its withdrawal from the region to allow the violent revolution to succeed. They now place their failures not only at the feet of the Egyptian authorities but also blame the United States that allows the regime to exist.

Al-Zayat also highlights the 1998 trial of Mohammed Al-Ghizlani, an EIJ operative who carried out the failed attack on Israeli tourists in a Cairo

Bazaar. Al-Ghizlani's anti-Jewish closing argument offers a glimpse of Al-Zawahiri's senior planners. Al-Ghizlani claims that Israel purposefully puts out that Egypt is unsafe for tourists in the worldwide media in order to divert valuable tourist currency away from Egypt and clandestinely shatter its economy.<sup>28</sup> His argument is a new way for EIJ to divert blame for its unpopular attacks on tourists in Egypt by blaming the Israelis in a convoluted conspiracy theory. Challenging these theories along with their twisting of Islamic law is an important aspect of this war on terrorism.

## VII. Al-Zawahiri Out of Control

As Al-Qaeda's chief ideologue, Al-Zayat devotes his last chapter to three cases that demonstrate Al-Zawahiri spinning out of control from a jihadist standpoint. He begins the chapter by describing the EIJ organization. It consists of Al-Zawahiri as the emir (head) and five major committees beneath the emir.

The Finance Committee is responsible for finding and developing sources of income, managing investments, paying EIJ members and their families, and providing fund transfers for EIJ operations. The Civil Affairs Committee recruits and trains new members, is involved in the indoctrination process and determines how members communicate with each other and EIJ leaders. The Military Operations Committee provides military training for select members and organizes them into small guerilla cells; Al-Zawahiri and EIJ leaders tightly control this committee. The Islamic Law (Shariah) Committee provides fatwas (religious rulings) and sanctions for military operations and works closely in preparing reports to Islamically justify EIJ actions. The final committee, the Internal Security Committee, protects EIJ leadership, conducts background investigations of members and carries out executions of members deemed as collaborators.<sup>29</sup> This committee also participates in obtaining false travel documents and making travel arrangements for EIJ members and their families.

Al-Zayat describes how a young EIJ member's son was executed in front of his father for collaborating with the Egyptian authorities while Al-Zawahiri was in Sudan. The Sudanese government was concerned about EIJ having its own court and executioners that condemned members

outside the country's legal system. This, combined with Sudan's worry about relations with Egypt, was one of several determinants that caused the Sudanese to get rid of Bin Laden and Al-Zawahiri in 1998. The second story involved an Arab-Afghan fighter and EIJ member Abu Khadija who was captured and tortured by Egyptian authorities. Al-Zayat claims he was forgiven by Al-Zawahiri during a meeting in Mecca, in which he assured him that since he was under torture he could not be held responsible. Shortly upon his return to Afghanistan Abu Khadija was killed in a dubious car accident in Pakistan. A few Islamists feel he was murdered on the orders of Al-Zawahiri. The final ploy described in Al-Zayat's book is Al-Zawahiri giving his resignation as head of the EIJ in 1998, only to have it refused by members. Al-Zayat explains that EIJ members had no choice but to keep Al-Zawahiri and the source of funds he obtained through Bin Laden. His alliance with Bin Laden was EIJ's main source of income by 1998 and accepting Al-Zawahiri's resignation meant EIJ members would be destitute.<sup>30</sup>

### **VIII. Al-Zawahiri's Writings and Conclusion**

This section is an analysis of Al-Zawahiri's last book, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, a 2001 series of essays published in Al-Sharq Al-Awsat.<sup>31</sup> The book's subtitle, "Meditations of the Jihadist Movement," is revealing because it shows Al-Zawahiri's ability for deep contemplation over the past and future of Islamic militancy. No doubt he has spent hours in the hills and caves of Afghanistan reflecting on new directions for the movement.

Unlike his 1996 book, *Bitter Harvest*, Al-Zawahiri wrote *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner* after the events of September 11, 2001, and under the pressure of allied forces hunting him down. It is 21 chapters and reveals a geo-strategic history and vision of the Al-Qaeda organization. "The Arab and Western media are responsible for distorting the image of the Arab-Afghans by portraying them as obsessed, half-mad people who have rebelled against the United States that once trained and financed them," Al-Zawahiri writes. He is obviously image-conscious and sees the U.S. as depriving Arab Muslims of their contribution in destroying the Soviet Union.

Al-Zawahiri also writes that Arab Afghans are not an American creation, but that financial aid came from Arab sources throughout the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and amounted to \$200 million. This also means that every major attack on the United States is calculated by Al-Zawahiri to have a media impact, as well as potentially elicit a certain predictable retaliation from his adversaries.

The Bush Administration was wise to pause after September 11th and study options to deal with Al-Qaeda, as no doubt Al-Zawahiri hoped for global war against Islam to justify their positions. He describes this stage of the battle as a global one, and that the forces of the disbelievers have united against the mujahideen. “The battle today cannot be fought on a regional level without taking into account the global hostility towards us (Muslims).”

Elements of the geo-strategic impact of Al-Zawahiri’s operations can be seen in the bombing of the Egyptian embassy in Islamabad. He writes that this particular operation was done to warn the Pakistani government of its overzealous cooperation with Egyptian authorities in handing over Egyptian Arab-Afghans to Cairo. Al-Zawahiri even states that Egyptians who became naturalized Pakistani citizens were turned over. A team was formed to carry out the plans, and a list of targets drawn, which included the U.S. and Egyptian embassies. The list also included cost estimates as Al-Zawahiri claims that the U.S. embassy could have been struck but was not, due to lack of sufficient funds.

*Knights Under the Prophet’s Banner* also lays a plan for future jihadists that Al-Zawahiri developed during his time in Afghanistan fighting the Soviets. He writes, “A jihadist movement needs an arena that would act like an incubator, where its seeds would grow and where it can acquire practical experience in combat, politics and organizational matters.”<sup>32</sup> He advocates that mixing Islam with nationalism has caused confusion among young Muslim men and that jihadist ideology needs to be kept pure from the taint of nationalism, leftist and communist slogans. He uses Palestine as an example of how different ideologies mingled with Islam led to the failure of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

After the ideological purification takes place and experience is gained, Al-Zawahiri recommends the identification of those Muslim leaders that thwart efforts at imposing an Islamic government. He cites the murder of President Najibullah after the Soviet withdrawal from

Afghanistan as an example of a Muslim who prayed and fasted but prevented an Islamic state from being created. Finally, he advocates striking at the superpower, citing the destruction of the Soviet Army in Afghanistan by the Islamic militants who defeated a great power. Thus, he argues, all things are possible.

Al-Zawahiri highlights some tactical issues that those involved in counter-terrorism should pay close attention to. He incites followers to attack Americans individually in his book, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, published in 2001:

Killing them (Americans and Jews) with a single bullet, a stab, or device made up of a popular mix of explosives or hitting them with an iron rod is not impossible. Burn[ing] down their property with Molotov cocktails is not difficult. With the available means, small groups could prove to be a frightening horror for the Americans and the Jews.<sup>33</sup>

What he is calling for is unstable and random acts of violence in American cities. When the sniper shootings occurred in Virginia and Maryland in 2002, the first passage that came to mind was this one, before they arrested John Muhammad and John Lee Malvo and it was revealed they intended on ransoming the city for \$10 million. Al-Zawahiri's reference to how a popular mix of explosives could be acquired in any hardware store is the type of suggestion that makes his book of concern.

Al-Zawahiri also advocates the careful selection of targets, types of weapons employed and careful planning no matter how long it takes to strike at a target. In *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, he also discusses the need for tactical withdrawal if a cell is discovered or infiltrated. His identified targets are the United Nations, Muslim nations allied with the west, multinational corporations, international communication and data exchange systems, international news agencies and satellite media outlets, as well as international relief agencies that he feels are a cover for evangelism and espionage by non-Muslims. This may explain the targeting of American missionaries in Yemen, Lebanon and Pakistan and does not rule him out as a suspect of the anthrax attack on NBC headquarters shortly after the 9-11 attack.

In his book, *Al-Hasad Al-Murr (The Bitter Harvest)*, he considers democracy a form of religion that must be destroyed. He sees no solution

to the crisis in the Middle East except by violent offensive jihad. *The Bitter Harvest* highlights the need to establish an Islamist base within the Islamic world, therefore restoring the caliphate and past Islamic glory.

There is no mention of how to govern, what an Islamic government is supposed to look like or even a program to deal with socioeconomic problems. In Al-Zawahiri's world, God will provide. He uses imagery, language, emotion and religious commentary to prey upon young Muslims. This is best captured by a poem written to his mother that seeks approval in the language of rhyme with a touch of classical Arabic phraseology.<sup>34</sup> He speaks of the separation he has to endure from his mother as the price of service to God, as if he were trying to win over a new recruit by seeking acceptance and vindication for what he is doing in the name of his version of Islam.

In addition to Al-Zawahiri's use of language and the media, as a medical doctor he has a healthy respect for Weapons of Mass Destruction and is most likely part of any Al-Qaeda plans to deploy chemical and biological weapons. "Al-Zawahiri, dead or alive," will always be the Trotsky of international militant Islam. It is crucial to understand that his writings will be a part of Islamic militant lore. Therefore, part of this battle is to discredit his anarchist views and his manipulation of Islamic history and law to suit his revolutionary ambitions.

## Notes

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19. Associated Press diagram of the Al-Qaeda Leadership captured, at large and killed. Featured in March 3, 2003 edition of Washington Times.

20. Al-Zayat, “Ayman Al-Zawahiri As I Knew Him”, 85-86.

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23. Ibid., 114-116.

24. Ibid., 125.

25. Ibid., 120-126.

26. Ibid., 130-136.

27. Ibid., 186-187.

28. Ibid., 147-149.

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30. Ibid., 199-208.

31. The Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) provided the author the complete translation of Ayman Al-Zawahiri’s book, “Knights Under the Prophet’s Banner.” All excerpts from this article were taken from the FBIS translation of the Sharq-Al-Awsat Newspaper in which his writings appeared, Document ID: GMP20020108000197, December 2, 2001.

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